

## **HERSETH SANDLIN HOLDS HEARING ON FUTURE OF NEW POST-9/11 G.I. BILL CLAIMS PROCESSING**

**January 22, 2010, Washington, DC**-U.S. Rep. Stephanie Herseth Sandlin, Chair of the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, held a hearing Thursday to discuss the future of the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill claims processing system. The oversight hearing was part of the ongoing work of the Economic Opportunity Subcommittee, under the leadership of Rep. Herseth Sandlin, to ensure proper and timely implementation of the new veterans education benefit.

At the hearing, the VA presented the projected timeline for implementation of its long-term strategy to improve the processing of education claims. The VA has been working with the Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command (SPAWAR) to design a modern rules-based system to make claims processing more efficient and limit the delays some veterans have experienced since the Post-9/11 program began paying benefits in August.

"The delays in processing education claims that some veterans experienced are unacceptable," Herseth Sandlin said. "I am pleased the Administration shares my concerns regarding these shortcomings, and is actively working to improve the situation. The VA and SPAWAR have made significant progress on the design of the long-term solution, which is designed to, when fully implemented, deal with many of the inefficiencies that led to the delays many veterans experienced during the fall semester."

The VA and SPAWAR said the long-term solution will start being installed and tested at the four VA regional processing centers in March with the system scheduled to be fully operational across the nation in December 2010. System updates slated for June and September will begin to provide claims workers the tools needed to improve processing speed.

Another topic of the hearing was the actions the VA took to alleviate the backlog of benefits that was created during the recently completed fall semester. VA officials reported that they had made significant progress in eliminating most of the backlog and that all enrollment certifications received before January 19, 2010 will be processed for payment by February 1, 2010 in order to clear the way for VA staff to handle the expected influx of claims from the spring semester.

"The VA has taken firm action and shown a commitment to addressing the ongoing backlogs in the distribution of education benefits," Rep. Herseth Sandlin said. "While I am concerned that some of the VA actions, such as redirecting call center staff to processing claims, have had a negative impact on other aspects of the VA educational benefits program, I applaud the VA for their actions to address the backlog."

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